

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
DALLAS DIVISION**

TOMMY W. STEELE,)
ID # 4227-15,)
 Plaintiff,)
vs.) **No. 3:16-CV-1262-M-BH**
)
PATRICK WILSON,)
 Defendant.) **Referred to U.S. Magistrate Judge**

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATION

Pursuant to *Special Order 3-251*, this *pro se* prisoner action has been referred for judicial screening. Based on the relevant filings and applicable law, the plaintiff's claims should be summarily **DISMISSED** with prejudice.

I. BACKGROUND

Tommy W. Steele (Plaintiff), an inmate in the Wayne McCollum Detention Center, sues Ellis County District Attorney Patrick Wilson (DA) under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for unlawful indictment and false imprisonment. (doc. 3 at 1, 3.)¹ Plaintiff was arrested on May 11, 2015, and indicted on November 11, 2015, for possession of a controlled substance less than one gram in Cause No. 40590-CR, in the 443rd Judicial District Court of Ellis County, Texas. (*Id.* at 4-6, 9.) On April 18, 2016, his attorney moved to dismiss that indictment for want of timely prosecution. (*Id.* at 9-11.) The motion was granted, and the case was dismissed without prejudice on April 27, 2016. (*Id.* at 12.) Plaintiff claims he was illegally detained before he was indicted for the crime for which he had been arrested, and that the indictment was defective because it exceeded the time limitations provided by law. (*Id.* at 4-5). He seeks to have the criminal case dismissed with prejudice so that

¹ Citations to the record refer to the CM/ECF system page number at the top of each page rather than the page numbers at the bottom of each filing.

the DA cannot refile the charges, and monetary compensation for the time during which he was incarcerated. (*Id.* at 4.)² No process has been issued in this case pending screening.

II. PRELIMINARY SCREENING

Plaintiff is a prisoner who has been permitted to proceed *in forma pauperis*. Because he is a prisoner seeking redress from an officer or employee of a governmental entity, his complaint is subject to preliminary screening pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. *See Martin v. Scott*, 156 F.3d 578, 579-80 (5th Cir. 1998) (per curiam). Because he is proceeding *in forma pauperis*, his complaint is also subject to screening under § 1915(e)(2). Both § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b) provide for *sua sponte* dismissal of the complaint, or any portion thereof, if the Court finds it is frivolous or malicious, if it fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or if it seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.

A complaint is frivolous when it “lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact.” *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989). A claim lacks an arguable basis in law when it is “based on an indisputably meritless legal theory.” *Id.* at 327. A complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted when it fails to plead “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007); *accord Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1949 (2009).

III. SECTION 1983

Plaintiff sues and seeks monetary damages under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Section 1983 “provides a federal cause of action for the deprivation, under color of law, of a citizen’s ‘rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws’ of the United States.” *Livadas v. Bradshaw*, 512

² Plaintiff was arrested on an unrelated offense on November 19, 2015, and he remains in custody. (See doc. 3 at 1, 6.)

U.S. 107, 132 (1994). It “afford[s] redress for violations of federal statutes, as well as of constitutional norms.” *Id.* To state a claim under § 1983, Plaintiff must allege facts that show (1) he has been deprived of a right secured by the Constitution and the laws of the United States; and (2) the deprivation occurred under color of state law. *See Flagg Bros., Inc. v. Brooks*, 436 U.S. 149, 155 (1978); *Cornish v. Corr. Servs. Corp.*, 402 F.3d 545, 549 (5th Cir. 2005).

A. Claims for Habeas Relief

Plaintiff seeks to challenge the validity of case No. 40590-CR. Habeas relief is an inappropriate remedy in a § 1983 action, however. *See Wolff v. McDonnell*, 418 U.S. 539, 554 (1974). A prisoner cannot challenge the fact or duration of confinement. *Clarke v. Stalder*, 154 F.3d 186, 189 (5th Cir. 1998) (citing *Preiser v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 475, 487 (1973)). He may only do so within the exclusive scope of habeas corpus. *See Preiser*, 411 U.S. at 487. Plaintiff may only obtain declaratory or monetary relief in this § 1983 action, so he fails to state a cause of action upon which relief may be granted on his request that case No. 40590-CR be dismissed with prejudice.

B. Claims against the DA

Plaintiff sues the DA based on his role as a prosecutor in case No. 40590-CR.

1. *Official Capacity Claim*

To the extent that Plaintiff is suing the DA in his official capacity, an official capacity claim is merely another way of pleading an action against the entity of which the individual defendant is an agent. *See Hafer v. Melo*, 502 U.S. 21, 26–27 (1991); *Kentucky v. Graham*, 473 U.S. 159, 165 (1985). When acting in their official prosecutorial capacities, Texas district attorneys and assistant district attorneys are considered agents of the State, which is immune from claims for damages under the Eleventh Amendment. *Neinas v. Texas*, 217 F.3d 275, 280 (5th Cir. 2000); *Esteves v. Brock*, 106

F.3d 674, 678 (5th Cir.1997); *Quinn v. Roach*, 326 F. App'x 280, 292-293 (5th Cir. May 4, 2009). The Eleventh Amendment provides: “The Judicial power of the United States shall not be construed to extend to any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the United States by Citizens of another State, or by Citizens or Subjects of any Foreign State.”³ “The Eleventh Amendment acts as a jurisdictional bar to a suit in federal court against a state or one of its agencies. This immunity applies unless it is waived by consent of a state or abrogated by Congress.” *See Curry v. Ellis Cnty., Tex.*, 2009 WL 2002915, at *3 (N.D. Tex. July 10, 2009) (citing *Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 99-100 (1984)). Although Congress has the power to abrogate that immunity through the Fourteenth Amendment, *Kimel v. Fla. Bd. of Regents*, 528 U.S. 62, 72-76 (2000), and the State may waive its immunity by consenting to suit, *AT&T Communic'ns v. BellSouth Telecomms. Inc.*, 238 F.3d 636, 643 (5th Cir. 2001), the State has not waived its immunity by consenting to suit nor has Congress abrogated the immunity by enacting 42 U.S.C. § 1983, *see Will v. Mich. Dep't of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989).

Any official capacity claim against the DA is based on actions that he took in his capacity as an agent of the State of Texas. Accordingly, any official capacity claims against the DA under § 1983 should be dismissed because the State of Texas is immune from suit.

2. *Individual Capacity Claim*

To the extent that Plaintiff sues the DA in his individual capacity, prosecutors enjoy absolute immunity to initiate and pursue criminal prosecutions. *See Imbler v. Pachtman*, 424 U.S. 409, 430-31 (1976). The Supreme Court has recognized that a prosecutor has only qualified immunity with

³ Although courts and litigants often use “Eleventh Amendment immunity” as a “convenient shorthand”, the phrase is “something of a misnomer, for the sovereign immunity of the States neither derives from, nor is limited by, the terms of the Eleventh Amendment.” *N. Ins. Co. of N.Y. v. Chatham County, Ga.*, 547 U.S. 189, 193 (2006) (quoting *Alden v. Maine*, 527 U.S. 706, 713 (1999)).

respect to his or her administrative and investigative duties. *Buckley v. Fitzsimmons*, 509 U.S. 259, 269 (1993).

Plaintiff has made no allegation that the DA acted other than in an adjudicative role as a prosecutor. He claims that the DA failed to timely file charges against him. A prosecutor is entitled to absolute immunity for acts taken to initiate prosecution, even against allegations that he acted “maliciously, wantonly, or negligently.” *Rykers v. Alford*, 832 F.2d 895, 897 (5th Cir. 1987), *citing Morrison v. City of Baton Rouge*, 761 F.2d 242, 248 (5th Cir. 1985). Because all of the acts of which Plaintiff complains were taken during the course and scope of his duties as a prosecutor, the DA is entitled to prosecutorial immunity. *See Imbler*, 424 U.S. at 423. Any § 1983 claims against him in his individual capacity should be dismissed.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Plaintiff’s claims against the DA should be **DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE** pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A(b). This dismissal will count as a “strike” or “prior occasion” within the meaning 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).⁴

SIGNED this 1st day of July, 2016.



IRMA CARRILLO RAMIREZ
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

⁴ Section 1915(g), which is commonly known as the “three-strikes” provision, provides:

In no event shall a prisoner bring a civil action or appeal a judgment in a civil action or proceeding under this section, if the prisoner has, on 3 or more prior occasions, while incarcerated or detained in any facility, brought an action or appeal in a court of the United States that was dismissed on the grounds that it is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, unless the prisoner is under imminent danger of serious physical injury.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR SERVICE AND
NOTICE OF RIGHT TO APPEAL/OBJECT**

A copy of these findings, conclusions and recommendation shall be served on all parties in the manner provided by law. Any party who objects to any part of these findings, conclusions and recommendation must file specific written objections within 14 days after being served with a copy. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). In order to be specific, an objection must identify the specific finding or recommendation to which objection is made, state the basis for the objection, and specify the place in the magistrate judge's findings, conclusions and recommendation where the disputed determination is found. An objection that merely incorporates by reference or refers to the briefing before the magistrate judge is not specific. Failure to file specific written objections will bar the aggrieved party from appealing the factual findings and legal conclusions of the magistrate judge that are accepted or adopted by the district court, except upon grounds of plain error. *See Douglass v. United Servs. Automobile Ass'n*, 79 F.3d 1415, 1417 (5th Cir. 1996).


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UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE